WINTER’S LAW AGAIN

FREDERIK KORTLANDT

Since I discussed the scholarly literature on Winter’s law twenty years ago (1988), several important articles on the subject have appeared (Young 1990, Campanile 1994, Matasović 1995, Derksen 2002, Dybo 2002, Patri 2005, Derksen 2007). As the law evidently continues to be controversial, it is important to look into the nature of the evidence and counter-evidence which is adduced. It appears that doubts about Winter’s law are largely the result of four types of misunderstanding.

First of all, Winter’s law yielded glottalization of a preceding syllabic nucleus, not lengthening of a preceding vowel, contrary to what is still maintained by Campanile (“allungamento”, 1994: 349), Matasović (“lengthening”, 1995: 61) and Patri (“allongement”, 2005: 269). The glottalization merged with the glottalic reflex of the Indo-European laryngeals and remained distinct from vocalic length in Balto-Slavic. At a later stage, glottalization could yield short or long vowels in the separate languages, e.g. short o in Polish krowa ‘cow’ but long ô in the Upper Sorbian cognate kruwa < krówa (cf. Kortlandt 1985: 123, 2006a: 361), similarly Polish słodki ‘sweet’ but Upper Sorbian slôdki with an acute from Winter’s law (cf. Stang 1966: 161, Young 1990: 146). Glottalization was preserved in Russian at the time of the earliest Latvian borrowings, as Steven Young has shown at last year’s conference in Copenhagen (cf. Kortlandt 2006b in fine). It has been preserved up to the present day in conservative varieties of Latvian, e.g. pē̂ds ‘footstep’, nuôgs ‘naked’, as in British English foot and naked.

Secondly, Winter’s law did not operate if there was an intervening *-s-, e.g. in Lith. lizdas ‘nest’, Latin nîdus < *nîdos, with the zero grade of the root *sed- ‘sit’. As I pointed out earlier (1988: 394), I think that the Slavic word xoditi ‘to walk’ was formed on the basis of a Balto-Slavic reduplicated present *sizd-, cf. Vedic sîdati ‘sits’, Latin sîdô ‘sit down’, which is reflected in the Slavic stem form šod- ‘went’. The derivation is comparable to that of Lith. statîti ‘to put’, stâto ‘puts’ from an original present 3rd sg. *stastâti, 3rd pl. *stastinti (cf. Kortlandt 1989b: 108). The absence of an acute from Winter’s law in Slavic xoditi is thus comparable to the absence of length from Lachmann’s law in Latin -sessus ‘sitten’ for original -ssus < *sdtos (cf. Kortlandt 2007: 88, 122). The hypothesis that the Slavic deverbal noun xod in is a borrowing from Iranian (most recently Dybo 2002: 479) is semantically implausible and leaves the stem form šod- unexplained.
Another clear example where Winter’s law was blocked by an intervening *-s- is Lith. mazgòti ‘to wash’, Ved. májjati ‘sinks’, Lat. mergō ‘plunge’ < *-sg- (see Dybo 2002: 480-485 for more examples). According to Dybo (2002: 485-495), Winter’s law was also blocked by a following *-s-, e.g. in Slavic losa ‘vine’, Lith. lazdà ‘stick’, Prussian laxde ‘hazel’ < *-gzd- and in Lith. blizgèti ‘to shine’ < *-gsk-. Note that an early (Indo-European) loss of glottalization in stops before *-s- explains the absence of an acute from Winter’s law in Slavic osb and Lith. ašis ‘ axle’, axis, which Dybo does not mention, and the absence of length from Lachmann’s law in the Latin cognate axis as well as in tussis ‘cough’, which seems to be at variance with the regular operation of the law in the inflected forms adáxim ‘may have driven’ < *-g÷s- and tüssus ‘beaten’ < *-dt- (cf. Strunk 1976: 27f., Kortlandt 2007: 88f.). These etymologies remain doubtful, however. Another cluster which evidently blocked Winter’s law is found in Lith. duktè ‘daughter’, Old Church Slavic došti < *-gH2t-, where glottalization was also lost in Vedic duhitǝ and Avestan dugǝdǝ.

Thirdly, the distinctive opposition between voiceless, voiced (glottalized) and voiced “aspirated” stops was neutralized before *-n-, which became infixed, as Thurneysen realized 125 years ago (1883), e.g. Latin pandō ‘spread’ < *-t-, pingō ‘paint’ < *-k-, mungō ‘wipe’ < *-k-, but Greek πιννεμι, Vedic pinnâti, munâti with restoration of the voiceless stop, similarly Latin unda ‘wave’ < *uñdānā < *udnā (Thurneysen 1883: 303). The latter word is identical with Slavic voda ‘water’, where *un was lowered to *on at stage 5.10 of my chronology (1989a: 47) and the infixed nasal was dissimilated before the nasal suffix, which is preserved in the derivative povom beside povod and in the East Baltic cognates (cf. Kortlandt 1979: 61). The same lowering and loss of the infixed nasal is found in Slavic ogniv ‘fire’, Lith. ugnis, OLith. ungnis (ibidem and Dybo 2002: 498). The infixation of the nasal suffix explains the rise of nasal presents such as Latin vincō ‘conquer’, Vedic yunâkti ‘joins’, Hittite harnâkti, harnînkanzi ‘make disappear’, where the intermediate stage is still represented in Greek khândânō ‘contain’, lanthânō ‘escape notice’. As a rule, Baltic generalized the infix and Slavic the suffix in the nasal presents. There is a nice parallel of the phonetic development in the Old Spanish imperative dandos < dandnos < dandnos ‘give us’ (Poema del Cid, cf. Cornu 1880: 95), cf. also Latin agnus [ŋn] ‘lamb’, sommus ‘sleep’ < *-pn-, inscriptional spellings such as ingestus ‘fire’, congnatus ‘related’ (Allen 1970: 23), and Greek annum ‘lamb’ < *-g’n-., prægma [ŋm] ‘deed’ (Allen 1974: 35f.).

In the case of Lith. sègti ‘to attach’ and Vedic sájati ‘hangs’, it is important that the absence of a radical nasal is limited to Baltic while the other languages point unambiguously to an original root *seng-, as is clear from the perfect sasānja, the passive aorist āsañji, German Senkel ‘lace’, Polish sięgać ‘to reach’, Czech sahati, Serbo-Croatian sèžati with an acute from Winter’s law, but loss of the acute before the nasal suffix in Czech sáhnouti, Serbo-Croatian sègnuti. We must therefore accept that the absence of the radical nasal from Lith. sègti is secondary, as it is in ugnis for earlier ungnis and in Slavic ogniv̞ and voda beside Lith. vandu̞ and Latin
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unda (see Dybo 2002: 498-502 for more examples). Dybo’s view that Winter’s law was also blocked by a following *-r- (2002: 496f.) cannot be correct in view of Lith. ūdra ‘otter’, Slavic vydra (a) and vědro (b) ‘bucket’. In the latter word, pretonic glottalization was lost phonetically at stage 5.3 of my chronology (1989a: 46) and length was preserved because the accent was retracted before the rise of the new timbre distinctions at stage 7.13 (cf. Derksen 2004), though the expected short reflex of the original pretonic long vowel seems to have been preserved in Czech vědro and Serbo-Croatian vjèdro beside vijèdro, Slovene védro. Slavic dobrъ ‘good’ must be separated from Latin faber ‘artificer’ (cf. Schrijver 1991: 102) and Lith. gaidrùs (4), gièdras ‘clear’ probably took its circumflex from gaìsas ‘glow’, gaìstras ‘fire’, Latvian gàiiss ‘air’, gäisma ‘light’, gāïs ‘light (adj.)’ (cf. Derksen 1996: 223) while škidrs ‘liquid (adj.)’ resulted from a recent Latvian shortening (cf. Derksen 2007). For the short vowel in the zero grade *CRi/uC-, where glottalization was evidently lost at an early stage, e.g. in Lith. ligà ‘disease’, Slavic rozati ‘to neigh’, cf. Greek oïlìgos ‘little’, ereúgomai ‘bellow’, I refer to Dybo (2002: 503-505).


While Campanile lists 13 examples of Winter’s law and 10 counter-examples beside 9 instances of an unexpected acute and Matasović lists 25 examples and 20 exceptions, Patri claims 5 examples and 19 counter-examples without mentioning that Dybo lists 142 examples and 71 exceptions. Against this background, Patri’s remark (2005: 284) that Dybo “ne paraît pas avoir remarqué” four of his far-fetched counter-examples sounds highly peculiar. His extensive bibliography (138 entries pour épatier le bourgeois) does not make up for his misrepresentation of earlier views and his quite inadequate discussion of the data. His only original counter-example Slavic streógati ‘to scrape’ is not necessarily cognate with Greek streúgomai ‘am exhausted’ and would belong to Dybo’s category of zero grade *CRi/uC- from which the author lists “some stems (not all)” (2002: 503). The Slavic pronoun to ‘that’ < *tod (Matasović 1995: 65) lost its final stop before the operation of Winter’s law (stages 3.7 and 4.3 of Kortlandt 1989a: 44f.). I agree with
Dybo (2002: 478-480) that bogа ‘god’ and koза ‘goat’ are loan words and think that the same holds true for sedбо ‘saddle’ < ‘seat’, Gothic sitls (cf. Winter 1978: 440). Lith. pаdas ‘sole’ and Slavic podб ‘floor’ cannot be separated from Lith. иndas ‘dish’, priёdas ‘addition’, etc. and must therefore be derived from *podъH₁₀- (cf. Winter 1978: 439, Kortlandt 1988: 393). For Slavic igo (c) ‘yoke’, where the acute was lost as a result of Meillet’s law (stage 5.4 of Kortlandt 1989a: 46), I refer to Derksen (2003: 98). For Lith. вёдыс beside ведыс ‘bridegroom’ we have to start from *H₁₁ued- beside *ued₁₀-, as is clear from Greek éedna ‘dowry’, Old English weotuma (cf. Beekes 1969: 58f., Winter 1978: 444). Lith. smагус ‘heavy’ (Matasović 1995: 65) cannot be separated from smагус ‘pleasant, cheerful, merry, lively’ and has nothing to do with Greek мóгοс ‘toil, trouble, distress’. Thus, we are left with no real counter-examples to Winter’s law if only the early (Indo-European) loss of glottalization is taken into account and mistaken etymologies are removed from the data.

Leiden University

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